RAY COOPER AND ELTON JOHN

Elton John: tour dates

ELTON JOHN, whose decision to return to live shows after retiring in 1977 is still unexplained, plays a lengthy series of British shows including six at London's Theatre Royal in Drury Lane as part of his most extensive European tour to date. The tour starts in early February and brings John, who will be accompanied only by percussionist Ray Cooper, to Britain in March and April.

The idea for the tour, billed as A Single Man Plus Ray Cooper, came when the singer played a one-off show in November at the British Recording Industry Ball with Cooper. John was pleased with the result, and the decision to tour was made, but he has steadfastly refused to explain why he decided to go back on what seemed to be a firm decision to retire, announced to a packed Wembley Arena in late 1977.

He is currently suffering from flu, and his decision to return to the road was announced only shortly after he recovered from a period of intensive care in hospital after a breakdown caused by exhaustion and over-work, according to his record company Rocket.

The tour dates are: Glasgow Apollo (March 17, 18), Edinburgh Odeon (19), Newcastle City Hall (21, 22), Preston Guildhall (23), Belfast Whitla Hall (26, 27), Dublin National Stadium (29, 30), London Theatre Royal (April 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7), Brighton Dome (9, 10), Southampton Gaumont (11, 12), Bristol Hippodrome (14, 15), Oxford New Theatre (17), Coventry Theatre (18), Derby Assembly Rooms (19), Birmingham Hippodrome (21, 22), and Manchester Apollo (24, 25, 26).

Tickets for the shows go on sale on February 2, and will be available by post and personal applications. Tickets are priced £5.00, £4.00 and £3.00 except for Dublin and Belfast, where the prices are £5.00 and London, which will cost £7.50, £6.50, £5.00 and £3.00. Theatre Royal tickets will be available from the Harvey Goldsmith Box offices in Chappells, 50 New Bond Street, W1, and Great Gear Market, 85 Kings Road, SW3, as well as the theatre box office.

The European section of the tour, which includes Sweden, Germany, Holland, France, and Spain, marks the largest European tour John has undertaken.